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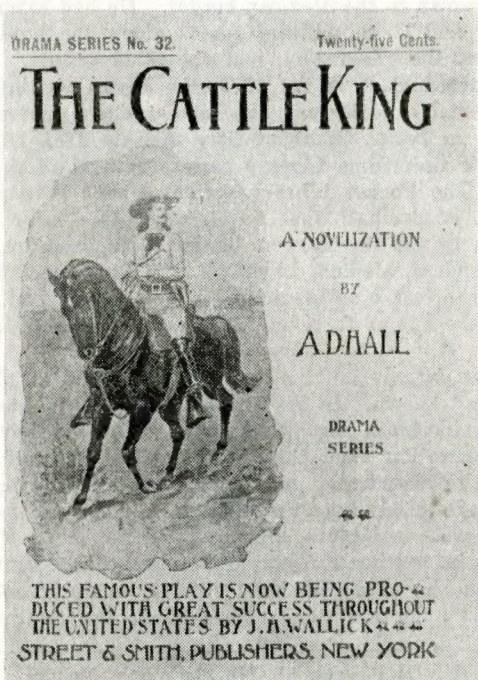
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Buckskin Sam's Portrayal Of Texas in Beadles Dimes

By James L. Evans



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Buckskin Sam's Portrayal Of Texas in Beadles Dimes

By James L. Evans

Since the West and Southwest were appropriate settings for action in the 1800s, many dime novelists chose those regions as their locale and their topic. Some authors who wrote about Texas had never been there and knew very little about either Texas or Texas history. With vivid imagination they wrote absurd tales for the dime novel readers of the East.

A few dime novelists who wrote about Texas had been in the state. One of those was Sam H. Hall. Born in New England, Hall had gone to Texas as a teenager in the 1850s. There he associated with scouts and frontiersmen. Because he always wore a buckskin costume, he was called Buckskin Sam. He used this name throughout his service in Texas and later as the author of his dime novels. He lived recklessly. He served with Texas Rangers (a state military force) before the Civil War, with both Confederate and Union forces during the war, and with Texas Rangers in fights against Indians and Mexicans again after the war. He served as a scout for more than a decade. Also, he knew San Antonio and its environs well, and he knew the area southwest of there and down to the Mexican border. He had extensive contact with both the Rangers and U. S. military forces along the border. He knew the settlers, the rivers, the geography, and the other scouts.

After he returned East in the 1870s, he began writing dime novels for Beadle. His personal experiences gave him excellent material. Many of his stories take place in Texas. Of about fifty in New York Dime Library series and the New York Half-Dime Library series (several of the Half-Dime were later reissued in The Pocket Library series), about twenty-one of the dime novels and fifteen of the half dime novels take place in or near San Antonio and/or between there and the Mexican border. The main locales are the present counties of Bandera, Medina, Live Oak, and Cameron. These stories were published during the last nine years of his life. If he had not succumbed to a fatal illness at the age of forty-seven he would probably have written many more.

His stories are largely autobiographical. He tells of places he had been and persons he had known. In his first dime novel, he states in the fourth sentence that the incidents are "historical events that have come under my own personal observation" and that in this story he would "depict frontier life as it is, in the chaparrals and on the prairies of the far Southwest." (DL-3, p. 2). Hall basically lives up to those promises not only in DL-3 but in all of his dime novels and half-dime novels about Texas.

I have lived in southeast Texas for more than twenty years. I have traveled widely in the area and have read extensively about local history. After having read numerous dime novels about the Southwest by Hall and

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others, I agree that in many ways he is far more realistic than others in depicting Texas history and frontier life. This article tells about his Texas writings and will comment on how they differ from and resemble those of other dime novelists. Naturally Hall wrote about Indian savages and Mexican bandits; the readers demanded that; but his knowledge of Texas and his realism are greater than in the works of others. He knew Texas geography. He knew the routine of daily life. He avoided the impossible and absurd. He used propaganda appropriate for Texans at the time.

Buckskin Sam knew the geography of South Texas, and he used it accurately. He knew where places were, and he knew the terrain and the vegetation. He regularly tells where, exactly where, incidents occur. The places can be located on an actual map. For example, he begins "Bluff Bill, or The Lynx of the Leona" with "The Leona river is a tributary of the Rio Frio, the last named river, after being increased in volume by the waters of the San Miguel and other smaller streams, forming a junction with the Rio Nueces, and emptying into Corpus Christi Bay." (DL—442, p. 1). On the next page he gives a more specific location for an incident by saying it is "some ten miles from the confluence of the Leona with the Frio, where the former stream makes a wide sweep to the northwest, curving around to the eastward." (p.2)

He uses Live Oak County, southeast of San Antonio, as a scene in many of his stories. This is a practical measure. Buckskin Sam had spent much time there and he knew the area. Also, it is located between San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Brownsville, making it a logical locale for action since it is in the midst of the area of Indian savages, Mexican bandits, and Anglo-American settlements. In several stories he refers to the town of Oakville, which was then the County Seat, and seems to know it well.

When dealing with Mexican bandits near the Rio Grande, he shows his knowledge of geography. He mentions such places as Bagdad and the former Guerrero (places known to local historians but long gone.) Bagdad, a Mexican port near the Rio Grande, was destroyed by a hurricane shortly after the Civil War; the former Guerrero, which should not be confused with the present town of Guerrero in the state of Tamaulipas, was eliminated in the early 1950's in order to build Falcon Dam. Having been in Brownsville, Rio Grande City, etc., Hall knows the area and the river. He often tells how far one place is from another, and here realizes the amount of time necessary to travel the distance. Furthermore, his knowledge of vegetation is realistic; the chaparrals, a significant feature of Texas, was significant in his writings.

Perhaps though his extensive use of his knowledge of geography almost becomes tedious to the reader. Furthermore, an Eastern reader of the 1880s or a reader of the 1980s, would need a Texas map. The villages of that time and the smaller rivers are not known to his readers as they were to Buckskin Sam who had spent years in the area.

Buckskin Sam knew about and told about things that were a part of daily routine. For example, in many dime novels by others there is no indication that characters ever eat. Some authors never mention the existence of food, the need for food, or the lack of food. Hall mentions food often. While a group is packing to leave San Antonio, one character tells a newcomer to the group: "We will have arms, ammunition, provisions, coffee-pot, tin cups, and frying-pan." (DL—3, p. 9). Describing a group camped en route to the Rio Grande, Buckskin Sam says they were "gathered around the fires, cooking, eating, smoking and joking." At times he tells what they ate: "After disposing of an extraordinary quantity of roast meat, bear's meat stewed with pepper, and corn bread, washed down with black coffee, without milk or

sugar, pipes were brought into use. . ." (DL—3, p. 3). When a lone scout on the Rio Grande met a group of others and asks about food, he is told "As to grub, we have 'bastante,' carne asado, chili colorado, frioles, and coffee as black as the beans before they were cooked." (DL—3, p. 3). Perhaps Eastern readers would not understand some of those words, but Sam does show the use of food. And we often have such expressions as "After the supper was eaten. . ."

Buckskin Sam even includes conversations regarding the preparation of food. Here is an example: "Joe, you are a brick at broiling a steak; that's the way to do it. Slip a piece of fat in between the lean; venison needs fat dripping on it, or it's too dry. It ain't like buffalo-steak; the juice or gravy isn't in it, nohow. A little bacon goes good with it, you bet!" (DL—3, p. 8).

The other routine matters, both among the military and civilians, are handled realistically. Once when he mentions a house, he begins with the words "a long log structure, common in Texas," and then he describes it. (1/2DL—349, p. 3).

The reality of life among the Rangers is shown in such statements as "in fact, your real bona fide Rio Grande Ranger is an inveterate smoker of cornshuck cigarettes, and mixes in with his frontier English a good smattering of Spanish, in an off-hand, shoulder shrugging smile." (DL—3, p. 18). And he gives information about guards on duty and how they evade the Indians.

Buckskin Sam avoids the impossible tricks used by some dime novelists. He does not use incredible coincidences. His stories are believable, gruesome at times, yes—but believable. For example, when Indians attack a family, we see them at numerous places, but perhaps only one Indian attacks the father, one the mother, and another the daughter. Thus, in spite of numerous Indian attacks used to give excitement, the total number of victims is a believable number, perhaps fewer than half a dozen. There is no massive slaughter of great numbers of whites, and usually the family had lived there for years in peace.

One major virtue of Buckskin Sam is that his speed of travel is realistic. For example, in one dime novel by another author, a man jumps on a horse at the Rio Grande and in two hours arrives in San Antonio, which is at least 150 miles away. Sam's characters travel at a possible pace. They camp for the night; they cook supper; they care for their horses.

Not all of Sam's characters are husky supermen or rugged-looking ones as one might expect of a frontiersman. Some, like Leon in "Bluff Bill," and like Buckskin Sam himself, were "small in stature, and somewhat feminine in appearance." (1/2DL—442, p. 2).

In some dime novels, characters disguise themselves as Indians and fool everyone, including the Indians, even for long periods. Buckskin Sam has no such absurdities. In "Bluff Bill," when an American scoundrel dresses as a Mexican bandit, the characters are curious about "the ruffian, in color and dress like a Mexican but whose features were American." (1/2DL—442, p. 9).

At times Buckskin Sam includes propaganda in the story or deviates from the narrative to bring in propaganda, and it is the propaganda appropriate for a person who had been in Texas then. In Texas at the time of Buckskin Sam's stories, there were individual scouts, there were Texas Rangers, and at places there were U.S. army posts with federal soldiers. Texans along the frontier repeatedly pleaded for more soldiers to protect them from Indian savages. At times Sam makes the reader feel that the government is to blame for Indian attacks by not sending more troops. After one terrible scene in

"Wild Wolf," the author comments: "It was a sight that would have caused a peace commissioner to go on the warpath, and swear that he would show no mercy to red foes, regardless of age or sex." (1/2DY—349, p. 9).

When having trouble along the Rio Grande, the character Reckless Joe blames the federal government: "'Tis strange, 'tis passing strange that our sister Republic (Mexico) should allow her citizens armed, with malice and hatred in their hearts, to invade the realms of Uncle Sam . . . henceforth and forever . . . we disown you, Mexico! No more shall the right hand of relationship be extended to the degenerate sons of Montezuma. You never got a shake from a Texan, anyhow; but at Washington they call you pet names . . . they sell you arms to use against their own citizens, and give you long credits. You owe Uncle Sam untold gold; you owe Texas blood more precious than all the gold in this most uncharitable, deceptive world." (DL—3, p. 14).

And when Captain Haynes of the U. S. army at Fort Brown does come to aid Colonel Ford of the Texas Rangers, Captain Haynes introduces himself with a complaint about Washington's inadequate forces on the border. "You know, Col. Ford," said Captain Haynes, "the government only gives us what you might call a corporal's guard to each of the frontier posts, and we are almost powerless beyond our own camp. One thousand cavalry ought to be stationed, continuously, between here and Eagle Pass and stationed so as to be easily brought together when any point is threatened by invasion by these cut-throat thieves. . . ." (DL—3, p. 15).

After a bloody incident in which a few Mexicans and Americans were killed, Fighting Bill Thompson comments on the future bloodshed by "Comanches, Apaches, Kioways, Kickapoos, and who knows what other red devils." He then refers to the problem of Mexicans: "The prairies and chaparrals of Texas have been bathed in gore, and the end is not yet; and none can say when it will be. Certainly not until the United States government cuts off six thousand miles of red-tape, which the secretary of war persists in hauling, **hand over hand, back and forth**, while the country is being devastated by hordes of Mexican outlaws, and war-parties of blood-thirsty Indians—not until the said secretary orders a full company of cavalry to take the place of the corporal's guard of infantry, in nearly every frontier post." (DL—3, p. 24)

In some ways Buckskin Sam strays from reality and uses the formulas and devices of dime novels. One is in the use of a girl in the story. So often he includes a girl "of sixteen summers," who is the daughter of a settler on the Texas frontier. She perhaps gets captured and perhaps is the basis for a love element. She might shoot a gun and ride a horse, but she does nothing incredible. A typical use of a girl is in his first dime novel, where Martha Wells insists she must leave her San Antonio home to seek her sick brother on the Rio Grande. She dresses in male attire but performs no miraculous deeds, and her disguise fools no one very long. At the end she is back in San Antonio, and we see her marriage to Reckless Joe Booth. The new husband is soon to leave for additional service in the Texas Rangers—without his bride. Though the conclusion seems contrived, it was genuine. Sam Hall actually knew Reckless Joe Booth and during his first days in Texas was employed by him.

Buckskin Sam does use Texas heroes to sensationalize. Big Foot Wallace, one of Texas' most noted, picturesque, and legendary scouts, appears in numerous stories by Buckskin Sam. But Big Foot, when not on expeditions, actually lived southeast of San Antonio in the area Sam writes about. Buckskin Sam actually knew Big Foot well and caroused and drank with him. The role of Big Foot serves several purposes; though basically factual, his character lessens the sense of reality but adds actions and humor. Big Foot

often gives advice, and he reveals the wisdom he has learned during years on the frontier. He has the prejudices we might expect. His speech is filled with alliteration, similes, and dialect that create humor. Big Foot is heroic, but he is never supernatural. He never does anything entirely incredible. In numerous stories Sam uses the character of Old Rocky, who is similar to Big Foot in ways of life, in goals, and in speech. Also, the character of the Tonk-away presents the same characteristics in an Indian who is friendly to the whites.

The role of revenge and vengeance are used throughout Buckskin Sam's stories. The white settler desires revenge on Indians and Mexicans, usually for a specific deed. In fact, much of the conflict between races is because of a desire for revenge; and while one side is seeking revenge, a fellow scout or fellow bandit is killed, causing a more frantic desire for revenge. The desire for revenge causes incidents that do not at first achieve revenge but do give the other side more reason for revenge. Thus, in the dime novel the conflict continues, just as it did in real life.

A typical situation is when Kit Carson's nephew sees that a Texas Ranger has been killed by Mexicans and says "Come on for vengeance." And in "Wild Wolf" there is the comment that "all being more eager for revenge, from the fact, that the slain were known, and held in high regard by them. In fact, as the frontier goes, they were neighbors; . . ." (1/2DL—349, p. 10).

In "The Three Trailers," the whole story exists because of Mad Monroe's desire for revenge; "His parents had been slain and mutilated, and his home burned when he was but a youth." Though but a child then, "he had vowed that he would terribly avenge his dear ones." (1/2DL—427, p. 3).

In "The Merciless Marauders," the author gives the expository statement that Cortina "detested all Americans, and lived only for revenge;" (DL—282, p. 14).

Buckskin Sam, like most dime novelists, holds the reader's attention by excessive use of suffering, gore, and bloodshed. But these elements are logical in stories where white men desire revenge against Indians and Mexicans, and where Indians and Mexicans desire vengeance on white.

Consider a few painful scenes.

In the early part of "Wild Will, the Mad Ranchero," we read: "The first thing to alarm Will and Mary was the crashing of a tomahawk through the skull of his old mother, and a scream of terror from Mrs. Halliday." (DL#90, p. 3).

In "Wild Wolf the Waco," six Texans escaped a flaming dwelling "but only to behold the triumphant, blood-seeking fiends, in a wide half-circle opposite them. An outer ring of warriors seated upon their mustangs showed that there was no hope. . . Then followed the sickening crunch of tomahawk, or war club, through the skulls, the grating of knives through flesh and bone, followed by shrieks of agony, despair and horror, as scalps were torn from the heads of the victims." (1/2DL—349, p. 9).

In "Kit Carson, Jr.," Sam writes: "Not fifteen feet from them lay the swollen, mutilated corpse of a man, covered with blood and clotted gore, the clothing torn in shreds from his mangled form; . . . There, upon the dead, sun-bloated corpse of the man, sitting astride of it, was his little son, seven years of age, blood oozing from a stab in the little fellow's temple, from a gash in his breast, and another in his wrist. . . To their horror they found that the flies had blown the wounds, and maggots were crawling in and out of the stabs in head and breast." (DL—3, p. 11).

While the Indians ordinarily used knives to scalp, the Mexicans used

knives to slash, as indicated in the following quotation: "Tied, hand and foot, to the trunks of these trees, are three Texans, stripped naked. A gash extended right and left across their bowels has allowed the intestines to fall, so that they hang to the ground." (DL—3, p. 16).

By having Anglo-Americans as well as the Mexicans and Indians guilty of cruelty, the author shows that cruelty is not a racial trait, and he adds to the intensity of the story. Note the following description of an American deed in "Frio Fred": "The keen blade was partly in the face of the savage, severing the nose and crushing one eye. . . ." Then the savage, "covered with gore, and with upraised knife, dashed at his assailant." An instant later another American sprung forward, "grasped the knife-wrist of the Comanche, plunging his own blade to the hilt in the broad, paint-daubed breast. . . (then) jerked out his bowie, and sent it crashing, with a horrible grating sound, again and again through flesh and bone. . . ." (1/2DL—332, p. 6).

Certainly Buckskin Sam uses the popular American stereotypes of the Indian savage and the Mexican bandit. Like other dime novelists, he emphasizes these stereotypes by repeatedly using such expressions as "warpainted savages," "red fiends," "brutal cutthroats," and "yellow skinned assassins." His Eastern readers expected and accepted these stereotypes, and he satisfied the readers and also helped preserve and strengthen the stereotypes. But unlike many dime novelists who merely regarded Indians as Indians, Buckskin Sam almost always deals with Comanches or Apaches, and he locates each tribe at a place where it actually was at the time. His Indians do ruthlessly burn dwellings, they do tie and torture their victims, and they do scalp. Notice the expository sentence in "Bluff Bill": "Some three score of Comanche braves, in all their horrid paraphernalia of savage war-paint, daubed and befeathered, their lances glittering in the light of the setting sun, their plumes flaunting and quirts flying, as they lashed their half-wild steeds in a course directly toward the paralyzed youths, and not more than four hundred yards distant." (1/2DL—442, p. 5).

The Indian behavior is often vividly portrayed very succinctly. Observe the following one-clause account of the Comanches' treatment of the Americans in "Frio Fred": "Next, having secured them to the trunks of tree they slashed off their scalps and ears, and otherwise mutilated them;" (1/2DL—332, p. 8).

Buckskin Sam uses not only the stereotype of the Mexican bandit but also the character of Juan Cortina, who was the Mexican bandit par excellence of the time. Sam had fought against Cortina's forces many times. Cortina, with his charisma, superior intelligence, and skills of leadership, had acquired a great following of lesser bandits from "the very scum of Mexico." Claiming that he was seeking revenge for misdeeds to Mexicans, Cortina had committed criminal acts and stirred up trouble in Brownsville. Americans, claiming that they were seeking revenge for misdeeds to Americans, sought further revenge. And racial tension increased. Many Mexicans had wandered into the semi-desert and chaparral areas of South Texas, perhaps seeking a living, and were accused of being Cortina's men. Cortina gladly accepted his position of power and the credit or blame for being in charge of all. Every wandering nomadic Mexican was labeled a bandit, and all bandits of South Texas in the 1860's were said to be part of Cortina's gang even though many of them owed him no allegiance and had nothing in common with him except mutual hatred for the powerful intruding Americans who had disrupted their pastoral ways of life.

One of the major discrepancies between fact and Buckskin Sam's writ-

ings is that Sam actually places Cortina in scenes in Live Oak County and near San Antonio. In fact, perhaps Cortina never got far north of the Rio Grande. But Eastern readers did not know that. Stories of Cortina's being nearer San Antonio and near larger American settlements far north of the Rio Grande added to the intensity and the excitement of a story filled with Mexican bandits.

Thus, we see that Sam Hall (Buckskin Sam) often used the stock traits of dime novels that readers expected and almost demanded even though at times his knowledge of Texas life crept into the use of those traits and caused him to include details that more easily corresponded with the truth than in stories by other dime novelists.

But in some respects—such as knowledge of Texas geography, the routine matters of Texas daily life, and the beliefs of Texans (whether on the trail, at home, or in a cantina), Buckskin Sam's works are largely autobiographical. And because they are autobiographical, they give a more realistic picture of Texas at the time than do most dime novels. I am not contending that these facts necessarily make his works better or more popular. The accuracy of his geography, for example, might be almost useless to anyone who has no knowledge of South Texas or no map available. But in many respects he did write about the Texas he had learned about, and most other dime novelists wrote about the Texas they had imagined.

Bibliography

Based on superficial study of several dime and half dime novels about Texas and on intensive study of the following ones:

Beadle's New York Dime Library

- #3 Kit Carson, Jr. The Crack Shot of the West
- #90 Wild Will, The Mad Ranchero; or, The Terrible Texans
- #221 Desperate Duke, The Guadalupe "Galoot"; or, The Angel of the Alamo City

Beadle's New York Half Dime Library

- #282 The Merciless Marauders; or, Chaparral Carl's Avenge
- #332 Frio Fred; or, The Tonkaway's Trust
- #349 Wild Wolf, The Waco; or, Big-Foot Wallace to the Frant
- #427 The Three Trailers; or, Old Rocky on the Rampage
- #442 Bluff Bill, or, The Lynx of the Leona

RECENTLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES CONCERNING DIME NOVELS. SERIES BOOKS, ETC.

A SLEUTH'S NEWEST VENTURE, by Barbara Basler. New York Times, Sunday, Oct. 26, 1986. A review of the modernization of the Nancy Drew stories being published by Simon & Schuster with a historical review of the Stratemeyer Syndicate as related to the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew. (Sent in by Stanley Pachon)

The Rover Boys Passed the Torch, by Anita Susan Grossman. A Review of "The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate" by Carol Billman. (Sent in by Jack Bales)

Eye on Publishing, by Anne McGrath. Wilson Library Bulletin, October 1986. A short review of the Nancy Drew stories as published by Siman and Schuster. "The older she gets, the Younger she looks." (Sent in by Jack Bales)

Nick Carter Turns 100, by Will Murray. Comics Buyer's Guide, September 26, 1986. A very knowledgeable history of Nick Carter. (Sent in by Stanley Pachon)

THE PORTRAYAL OF THE SOUTH IN THE ELSIE DINSMORE SERIES

By Elizabeth S. Frank

The Elsie Dinsmore series was created by Martha Finley, a life-long northerner. Martha Finley was born on April 26, 1828 in Chillicothe, Ohio and was raised in South Bend, Indiana. She was educated in private schools in Indiana and Pennsylvania, moving back to Indiana when her education was completed. She lived there until she was 35. On the death of her father, she moved first to New York state and then to Pennsylvania. She suffered from poor health and limited means and found it necessary to live with relatives.

She supported herself at first by teaching school in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. Her literary career started between 1854-1856 writing short stories for the serials of the Presbyterian Publication Board in Philadelphia. She wrote under the pseudonym, "Martha Farquharson." The first few books of the Elsie series were published under the name of Farquharson. All the later books were published under her own name.

Finley never married. The financial success of the Elsie books enabled her to leave her relatives home in Phoenixville. The series earned Finley over \$250,000 from sales both at home and abroad. With her new found independence, she bought her own home in Elkton, Maryland in 1876 where she lived until her death in 1909 at the age of 80.

The Elsie series was a tremendous popular success. Between 1868 and 1905, 28 volumes were published. They followed the life of the heroine from childhood to old age. As she grew, so did the numbers of her relatives, making family relationships difficult to untangle in the later books.

The first book, "Elsie Dinsmore," was considered the most popular work for children ever published in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Elsie was held up as an example for children to emulate. This popularity lasted until shortly after the turn of the century. By the early 1920's, Elsie was considered to be out of date, hardly a realistic example for children to follow. The two striking aspects of the entire series are the fundamentalist perspective of the characters and the unusual child-parent relationships that exist. These have provoked the most commentary in the twentieth century.

Elsie Dinsmore was the closest thing to an American princess in children's literature. She was a great beauty and possessed enormous wealth in her own right, as well as belonging to a wealthy family. She lived on a plantation and owned several others. An army of negroes supplied the manpower to work the plantations. They switched from being devoted slaves to devoted servants after the fourth book "Elsie's Womanhood." Elsie travelled extensively throughout the United States and overseas spending the four years of the Civil War in Europe. She gave and received lavish gifts and was a model wife and mother. Her faith was her cornerstone and she did not miss an opportunity to do good works or to speak to anyone on the glories of salvation. As one author put it "Only God was more powerful than Elsie Dinsmore—and He was on her side." (1)

The view of the south in the Elsie Dinsmore books is of great interest for several reasons. It would be suspected that 28 volumes about a plantation family growing up and living in the south between the 1850's and early 1900's would contain considerable detail about one of the most interesting periods in American history. The change in the southern way of life after the Civil War was quite dramatic. These changes are rarely mentioned in the series and do not affect the Dinsmore relations.

This is not surprising looking at Martha Finley's personal history. The

author lived the first 44 years of her life in northern states and the remainder barely south of the Mason-Dixon line. There is no record of her travelling extensively at any time of her life and many sources mention Miss Finley's poor health.

The lack of detail regarding everyday life is striking. Elsie Dinsmore was born in Louisiana and maintained her plantation Viamede throughout the series although she only visited there infrequently. She was removed by her father to another unnamed southern state, where she resided in a number of plantations for the rest of the series.

Characters dispense with the operation of a large household and plantation in one or two sentences. Elaborate entertainments are staged with a few hours notice. Servants quarters are visited and charity dispensed to the poor of the neighborhood without any real description of people or places.

Martha Finley's main sources of information appear to be the popular books and periodicals of her period. Details of the Civil War are taken from Headley's "History of the Great Rebellion," hardly sympathetic to the southern point of view. The descriptions of the Reconstruction and the activities of the Ku Klux Klan are dramatized from the published reports of the Congressional Committee of Investigation in "Elsie's Motherhood." The descriptions of the Teche country in "Elsie's Womanhood" come directly from Edward King's "Old and New Louisiana." The pattern continues throughout the books.

This approach has led to Martha Finley being criticized for lame scholarship by later reviewers. However, it provides for an opportunity to explore the history of the country from a unique perspective. The travels of Elsie with her family give the author a chance to recount tales of early America from her favorite books. Martha Finley also uses a great deal of anecdotal material accumulated either from readers or acquaintances. An example is the story of an Austrian physician told in "Elsie in the South." The man was mistaken for a spy during the Civil War. The account of his escape to Philadelphia and later return to Florida is told in great details.

The charm of the Elsie books lies in these small details. Rather than looking at the author's craftsmanship and scholarship, the historian should examine the influence the series exerted. Miss Finley's series books provide many opportunities for study beyond the obvious religious and familial themes. The Elsie series was a best seller by any standards. The books contain large sections devoted to the early history of the country all taken from current texts. The series was eagerly read by young girls growing up between 1868 and 1905. Comparing the histories in the Elsie books with contemporary school texts would make an interesting study.

Martha Finley's work provides for other comparisons. The Elsie Dinsmore series should be looked at in relation to the Mildred Keith series. The lack of detail in the Elsie series has already been mentioned. This is contrasted by the wealth of detail on daily life found in the Mildred series. The Mildred series is set in the frontier area of Indiana, an area familiar to Miss Finley. Mildred never reached the popularity of Elsie, extending only to seven volumes. Both characters are found visiting in both sets of books.

Martha Finley should not be dismissed lightly. Her work deserves further study in many different lights.

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— 1882. Grandmother Elsie.

— 1883. Elsie's New Relations.

— 1884. Elsie at Nantucket.

— 1885. The Two Elsie's.

— 1886. Elsie's Kith and Kin.

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— 1893. Elsie at Ion.

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— 1899. Elsie in the South.

— 1900. Elsie's Young Folks in Peace and War.

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